

Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

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Greetings from John Eriksson, President, GPS USA.

The contributions in this issue of the GPS Newsletter have disparate themes, but all are committed to peace through nonviolent alternatives. First is a tribute to treasured GPS Board Member Dr. Sovan Tun, who passed away on October 9. GPS was represented at the Memorial Services for Sovan at the Cambodian Buddhist Temple in Silver Spring, MD, where the GPS President and Vice President were honored to eulogize Sovan.

“Apology and Amends: Climate and the Ultimate Responsibility,” by GPS Board Member Dr. Robert Muscat, is a timely sequel to his previous pathbreaking articles “Apology: A Cement for Peace?” (December 2015 and May 2016 editions of the GPS Newsletter). The new piece links apology as an instrument of peace-making to the sizeable costs of mitigating the impact of climate change. Muscat suggests mechanisms by which countries responsible for major climate-warming emissions could transfer funds to those countries unable to shoulder the costs.

The third article, by John Eriksson, summarizes the second virtual GPS Forum, “The Covid 19 Pandemic: Magnifier of Inequality,” held on October 7, 2021. The Forum explored the effects of the pandemic on inequality and analyzed emerging proposals to reduce inequality as part of a strategy to overcome the pandemic. The main finding of the Forum was that the pandemic’s effects on inequality have been severe, multiple, vary by country, and have had a particularly strong impact on the poor and vulnerable. Elements of a strategy to overcome future pandemics while also effectively addressing the causes of inequalities among and within major ethnic groups include: (1) a substantial investment in vaccine production and equitable distribution mechanisms; (2) public sector expenditure policies and programs founded on principles of equitable benefit, opportunity and planetary sustainability; (3) raising resources to finance the strategy, based on equity and effectiveness. Additional significant findings are in the [Discussion Paper](#) and [Latin America Case Study](#) that framed the Forum discussion.

To continue and expand our current work, such as the GPS Newsletter, with articles readers are unlikely to find elsewhere and special events such as the 2019 discussion of the Colombia Peace Process, we need sustained help from you. Please consider making a generous tax-deductible contribution to GPS. Either mail a check to our postal address or donate through our website www.globalpeaceservices.org. Phone: 301-681-6968.

❧ In Memoriam: Dr. Sovan Tun 1940-2021 ❧

This issue of the GPS Newsletter is dedicated to the memory of GPS Board Member, Dr. Sovan Tun, who passed away October 9, 2021. We extend our profound condolences to Sovan's wife, Bean, his daughter, Ly, and sons, Larry and Rick.

Dr. Tun was a treasured GPS Board Member for 13 years, from 2008 to his passing in 2021. He was born in Battambang Province in Western Cambodia in 1940. Sovan won a U.S. Government scholarship to continue his studies in economics at the University of Tennessee and after earning a BA Degree, he returned to Cambodia in 1966 to join the Ministry of Agriculture and to teach at the secondary and university levels. Dr. Tun earned a French law degree from the Faculté de Droit et des Sciences Économiques. He subsequently became Director of Planning at the Ministry of Agriculture and was appointed to the National Economic Advisory Council.



In 1972, as the war in Cambodia escalated, Dr. Tun accepted a UN fellowship to continue his graduate studies. With his wife, he raised his family while earning his Ph.D. in Economics at the University of Tennessee. The family moved to Maryland, where Sovan devoted several decades of his professional life to public service, including consulting for the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in French-speaking African countries. He subsequently worked for several U.S. Government agencies culminating as a senior labor economist for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Dr. Tun also assumed a leadership role in the Cambodian Buddhist and Asian American communities that would last the rest of his life. He began by assisting dozens of family members and other Cambodians to emigrate to the United States in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge's bloody reign of terror. Later, he helped establish the Cambodian Buddhist Temple located in Silver Spring, MD. In 1998 he was appointed to the Maryland Governor's Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs and was selected to sit on the Asian and Pacific Islander Advisory Group for Maryland's Montgomery County Executive. Dr. Tun was also a member of the Board of Directors for the Interfaith Council (IFC) of Metropolitan Washington.

Dr. Tun's work for peace and nonviolence was also internationally recognized when he joined the Board of Directors of Global Peace Services (GPS) USA in 2008. Among his multiple contributions to GPS, Sovan wrote seven most thoughtful articles for the GPS Newsletter, including on peace and the teachings of Buddha and on U.S. Buddhist-Catholic Dialogue, reflecting on an audience with Pope Francis at the Vatican in 2015, for which Sovan led the Buddhist delegation. GPS was indeed fortunate and blessed to have Sovan Tun as a Board Member. He is sorely missed but will always be fondly remembered for his intellect, commitment to peace and his never-failing warmth.

Apology and Amends: Climate and the Ultimate Responsibility

In the December 2015, and May 2016 issues of this newsletter, we reviewed the recent world experience of apologies that governments (and other non-governmental entities) had made for injustices they had inflicted in the past. In important cases, the deleterious effects of the injustices have affected successive generations. The apologies generally were admissions of responsibility and culpability on the part of a country or institution as a whole, for which the apologizing authority legitimately spoke. Many injustices were committed on large groups of victims; some amounted to genocide. We noted a few of the complexities involved. Some of the citizens of apologizing countries deny moral responsibility for the sins of their predecessors, let alone their more remote ancestors; others reject any characterization of the past as warranting apology and contrition, or justifying calls for reparations. The manner of the apology matters: the wronged sometimes have rejected the apology as insincere or as mere tokenism. Wording counts: some apologizers avoid the very terms apology and reparations because of their possible legal and financial implications. Thus, the efficacy of official apology is often linked to issues of restitution and reparations. We concluded that apology for past injustices was a relatively recent international development, a sign of moral progress that should be more rigorously pursued as a norm for conflict mitigation and resolution, as a cement for peace.

In the four years since our initial article, numbers of additional official apologies have been made. For example, Germany apologized for the genocide its military committed in 1903-4 against the Herero and Nama people in its Southwest Africa colony, now Namibia; Germany also recognized that it had an obligation to provide reparations. In 2020, the Dutch Prime Minister apologized for the government's failure to help its Jews during the Second World War. Belgium apologized for its African colonial program of forcibly taking mixed-race children from their families and putting the children up for adoption in Belgium. In September 2021, Pope Francis apologized for crimes committed by the 16th century Spanish

Conquistadors during their conquest and evangelization of Aztec Mexico.

He asked for "forgiveness." Predecessor popes had also apologized for the predations of the Conquistadors. In contrast, spokespersons on the Spanish right objected to the apology, saying that an Argentine pope had no right to apologize for others, and that Spain had many reasons to be "proud" of its past.

In all the cases we cited there has been a single (government or nongovernmental entity) perpetrator and only a few (or one) groups of victims. We now face a new and unprecedented situation, caused by climate change, where every country in the world is implicated. The rich, industrialized countries, in the past many decades, have produced the bulk of the accumulated greenhouse gases that are now reaching critical levels. The poorer, developing countries are now also emitting such gases. All countries are beginning to suffer damage and dislocation due to weather extremes and warming of the earth. Vast and costly mitigation and coping (or adaptation) measures will be needed in all countries. Many of the poorer countries will be unable to finance the measures they need to take to deal with the effects of climate change.

In the international conferences (most recently, in Glasgow) where the world has grappled with climate change, the rich countries have recognized their responsibility to disproportionately shoulder the costs of mitigation and coping. In assuming this responsibility, the rich countries are implicitly apologizing for this planet-wide damage, even though it has been an inadvertent result of their economic and technological history. They are explicitly acknowledging a responsibility, in principle, for making amends - the largest, most universal case of making amends the world has ever seen. Meeting these financial pledges will require overcoming a host of political and economic hurdles, country by country.

To supplement the uncertain flow of funds dependent on these myriad government actions, we

propose the creation of an international climate superfund that would be fed by an appropriate international tax. What form of tax would be appropriate? What order of magnitude for the funds so generated should be considered? How would the funds be allocated among recipient countries? What institutional arrangements would be appropriate? These are complex questions. We suggest the shape of possible answers, to start a discussion.

To generate a large flow of funds, be easy to collect, and be politically appropriate and feasible, the tax rate should be low. Nevertheless, if levied on a large base of international transactions, such a tax could generate a substantial flow of funds. A tax on fossil fuels usage, by country, on tons of coal and barrels of oil, could meet these criteria. The tax should be uniform; imposed on the petroleum refining and coal mining entities (ease of

collection; presumably passed on to the consumers) and easy to monitor with transparent compliance procedures. The fund could be held, allocated (on a grant basis), uses evaluated, etc., by an international organization. The World Bank is an obvious candidate, although there are good arguments for creating a new world climate fund.

One advantage of such a tax is that once installed (not an easy task, to be sure) it would not need repeated annual authorization and budgeting, a politically hazardous process in many countries. The tax rate, the adequacy of the funds generated, the record of management and implementation, and the overall results could be periodically reviewed by successive international conferences on the status and forecasts of world climate change.

The gravity of the challenge demands bold action.

✿ Robert J. Muscat

“The Covid-19 Pandemic: Magnifier of Inequality” – The Second GPS Virtual Forum

Following an initial virtual Forum in March (“Managing Artificial Intelligence in a Violent World”), GPS sponsored a second Forum on October 7, 2021, “The Covid-19 Pandemic: Magnifier of Inequality.” The Forum’s main purpose was to explore the evidence on the extent to which the pandemic has affected inequality within the United States and in selected other countries. Another purpose was to analyze emerging proposals to reduce inequality as part of a strategy to overcome the pandemic.

The Forum drew on a [Discussion Paper](#) prepared to frame the discussion (also see GPS website under “Publications” and “Essays and other Documents”). After reviewing changes in the distribution of U.S. personal wealth historically and during the pandemic, the paper addressed in greater depth the experience of two sectors that have important implications for inequality and well-being: public health and education.

Several overarching findings emerged:

- Covid-19 affected us all in diverse ways, but it had a particularly strong impact on the poor and vulnerable had a particularly strong impact on the poor and vulnerable in multiple ways.
- The effects of the pandemic on inequality have been severe, multiple, vary by country, still emerging and becoming more divergent.
- The data reveal that the impacts of the pandemic have been to increase inequality by wealth and by public health and education outcomes, as well as by access to better employment, especially for women, and related services such as childcare.
- The paper reports on the pandemic’s global impact as described by the latest United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021. Of 17 SDGs, ten fell short of their projected targets, with the pandemic

given in most instances as a cause, and in some cases leading to a reversal of progress.

Specific findings include:

- The pandemic has exacerbated previously existing inequalities among major U.S. ethnic groups, particularly between Black and Indigenous groups as compared with White and Asian-American groups (as well as Latinx, where the picture is mixed).
- These differences are particularly significant for public health indicators, such as Covid-19 case rates, hospitalizations, and deaths.
- There is strong evidence that the gender impact of the pandemic on women is severe and is likely to be long-lasting.
- Three aspects of public health – eviction from shelter, domestic violence, and drug abuse, particularly of opioids – have intensified during the pandemic (for example, U.S. deaths from drug abuse are recently reported to have reached a historic 12-month high of 100,000, attributable in large part to the pandemic).
- The impact of the pandemic on education, ranging from enrollment rates to education outcomes, is becoming more apparent, severe and long-lasting in both the U.S. and particularly in developing countries.
- Internet access has provided only a partial solution to pandemic-induced school closures. Due to decades-long patterns of housing access discrimination and limited access to technology infrastructure, many students from minority groups and in disadvantaged circumstances live in homes without digital devices and broadband Internet access essential for effective online teaching and learning. U.S. broadband access should improve with implementation of the recently passed “Infrastructure Bill,” but other impediments remain for disadvantaged groups.

- A recent [case study on Latin America](#) suggests that conflict within and among countries has been exacerbated by the pandemic (see reference in GPS website under “Publications” and “Essays and Other Documents” (www.globalpeaceservices.com)).
- Evidence from recent flood and wildfire disasters suggests that climate change and pandemics are twin drivers of inequality.

Several recent analyses have suggested the elements of a strategy to overcome future pandemics and at the same time effectively address the causes that create indefensible inequalities among and within major ethnic groups.

Accomplishing these objectives will require changes and reforms of major proportions.

- But the pandemic also provides an unprecedented opportunity to successfully implement the needed changes and reforms.

The strategy entails three tracks:

1. A massive investment in vaccine production and equitable distribution mechanisms among all countries. Current but halting and inadequate progress is being made along this track.
2. Public sector expenditure policies and programs founded on principles of equitable benefit, opportunity and planetary sustainability, including substantial investments in human capital – education innovations, childcare reform, expansion of public health systems (including effective drug abuse and violence prevention programs), renewable and clean energy research, innovation and incentives. Recent proposed U.S. legislation (the “Build-Back-Better” Bill) includes most of the above elements but faces an uncertain future in the Congress.
3. Raising resources to finance the strategy based on equity and effectiveness,

including globally consistent and fair corporate tax rates and individual wealth tax rates, along with effective compliance approaches. Recent international agreement on minimum corporate tax rates across countries is a sign of progress, but reform of the structure of individual tax rates continues to lag, notwithstanding a great disparity between the wealthiest 1% and the bottom 99%.

This strategy can be criticized for being too ambitious and politically unrealistic. However, the Covid-19 Pandemic is a once-in-a-century crisis that also provides a once-in-a-century opportunity to implement the needed changes and reforms. If this opportunity is not taken now, future capacity and political courage will be lacking in the face of similar or worse future crises. If the vaccination rate in the poorest countries is allowed to remain at 2% or less, the Covid virus will be provided with ample opportunities to mutate into still more deadly and/or vaccine resistant variants that will inflict suffering on everyone. As one public health worker with decades of experience in sub-Saharan Africa put it: “None of us are really safe until all of us (globally) are safe.”

Consideration of the Discussion Paper continued during the Forum with comments and questions posed by three discussants.

Ken Bedell, a senior education adviser to the Obama Administration, author and United Methodist Minister, focused on the impact of the pandemic on education outcomes and equity. He stressed that educational equity requires technological equity. A significant number of African universities have had to close during the pandemic as they did not have the technology to enable them to go on-line to disseminate their courses. Similarly, in the United States, people living in poverty-afflicted areas could not benefit from opportunities provided by information technology.

New ways of thinking need to be pursued to accomplish the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Donor countries need to consult the poor for their recommendations on desirable approaches to

take in meeting these goals. Bedell underscored the preoccupation of reigning economic models on production and growth, rather than consumption patterns – and the inequities therein. We need to look at the interest of civil society and the poor.

Ted Steege, engaged in advocacy and writing through several interfaith groups in pursuit of racial equity and social justice, and a Lutheran Pastor, focused on the effect of the pandemic on the distribution of wealth and inequality. He called attention to a United Nations film, *The Pandemic is a Portal*, bearing the message that we shouldn't look to return to the Old Normal characterized by its substantial components of racism, dominance, white racism. We need to better understand our hidden assumptions and biases. We need to cultivate partnerships with the formerly oppressed – their energies and lives can be helpful in regaining what is needed to build a more equitable, just society.

Inequality is exacerbating the impact of COVID and intensifying the impact of climate change. Inequality manifests itself, for example, in insufficient refrigeration capacity to store vaccines to counter COVID or having insufficient resources to pay for vaccines. Africa has only some 2% of its continental population vaccinated. The world needs to be concerned about future pandemics; overcoming racism is a matter of everyone's survival.

The pandemic is clearly demonstrating that it is in the self-interest of the business sector to transform work environments that provide all too many dead-end jobs with low wages; people will not take up such jobs, with the result that production of goods and provision of services will fall, income to purchase goods and services will diminish.

Adam Isacson, Senior Associate for Regional Security Policy with the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), focused on intra and inter-country conflict, generally, and more specifically, in Latin America. Speaking from Bogota, Colombia, he emphasized COVID's compounding of decades of instability in much of Latin America and bringing with it the danger of a lost decade. The military in Latin America and in other regions, after

varying periods of retrenchment, was assuming increasing power - taking on humanitarian roles, as well as political ones. On the one hand, civil society is now more organized than before, helping out in various ways during COVID through women's and student groups, for example, but also significantly threatened by the military. The U.S. has to take a stronger stand in support of civil society in Latin America.

Climate change, causing droughts, is dramatically decreasing the land available for farming – reducing crop yields and in the worst cases leading to famine and migration. The resulting growing migration flows then lead to tension in the receiving regional countries -- potentially building up to armed conflict with residents of areas to which climate refugees are streaming.

Selected audience observations:

Hailu Makonnen: What opportunity is there to revolutionize education?

Ken Bedell, recalling his time teaching in Swaziland, saw the country's population increasing faster than the country's ability to mobilize the needed number of teachers. He felt we can no longer use the old model of education, with teachers being university-trained faculty. Other models are needed – access to telephones needs to be expanded as one vehicle for Internet communication and provision of on-line teaching and learning.

Adam Isacson underscored the importance of collective action in addressing problems. Some 80% of the U.S. population think that the rich should pay more in taxes -- it will take a strong civil society to get the government to deliver on this.

Bill Hurlbut called for a new communitarian ethos – undergirded by social and environmental sustainability - but people feared economic destabilization and the risk of losing economic stability. Hurlbut noted the frightening World Bank and other projections regarding Africa's economy in the 2040s. Large numbers of Africans will be migrating elsewhere – leading to cascading

challenges. Bill observed, “We've been stuck for two years, how to get off this?”

Ambassador to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and former General Alain Pereira made several observations regarding developments in Africa.

- The reason so few Africans were vaccinated is that people do not trust the vaccines – they think that “natural medicines” will heal them; they distrust introducing the chemicals present in the vaccines into their bodies.
- Social distancing was causing problems – increasing the educational deficit – people do not have computers and they are not adapting to on-line provision of information.
- The military are not always synonymous with what is negative – they can behave like saviors – Ghana being an example. The military in Africa often have higher levels of education than the general population and can bring organization and order.

John asked what would be useful in showing the 1% that it is in their self-interest to defeat the pandemic. Ambassador Pereira thought that one positive contribution of COVID to Africa might well be that with the COVID-related restrictions on travel by Africans, people will see that they can't always go to Europe to be treated for serious health problems. Health care in Africa, itself, needs to be transformed; African hospitals need to be repaired.

Father Innocent Rugaragu, SJ, who teaches at the University of Rwanda, and participated in the Forum from Kigali, spoke of the increase in Rwanda of the use of information technology and computers with the onset of COVID. On-line education has spread significantly in Rwanda; very few people now handle paper money; trading is through mobile phones.

✿ John Eriksson

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The newsletter of Global Peace Services USA is published regularly. GPS USA is incorporated in the State of Maryland and is tax-exempt. Current board members are Anna Amato, Aline Dukuze, John Eriksson, Robert Muscat, Mindy Reiser, and Ronald Ridker. We welcome contributions and comments. To contact us:

Global Peace Services USA
P.O. Box 27922
Washington, DC 20038-7922

Telephone: 301-681-6968
E-mail: globalpeaceservicesusa@gmail.com

Web site: www.GlobalPeaceServices.org

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Washington, DC 20038-7922
www.GlobalPeaceServices.org